

Introduction

PURPOSE OF STUDY

In 1999, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) developed long-range transportation plans for the state as part of TranPlan 21. The state transportation systems require significant investments over the next 10 to 20 years. Part of the significant investment is public transportation. MDT proposed a study to develop a long-term strategy for public transportation that integrates future service requirements with the facilities and capital improvements necessary to support those demands. The purpose of this report is to identify the needs for rural public transportation services within the state.

The needs assessment study has inventoried the existing transit agencies in the State of Montana, identified existing transportation needs, estimated demand for the public transit services statewide, and identified where an expansion of transportation services is necessary. Specifically, this study identifies:

- Baseline data for Montana transit agencies.
- The unmet transit need by county.
- The costs associated with upgrading public or nonprofit service to meet at least 50 percent of the identified need.
- Recommendations for meeting unserved transit needs.

It is important to note, however, that although every effort was made to quantify the level of existing transit services in order to determine unmet transit needs, not all services were included in this study due to factors including the lack of survey responses from some providers. This study also did not quantify the services that are being provided by taxis, family members, carpools, and other informal providers.



STUDY APPROACH

The LSC Team worked with an Advisory Committee throughout the project. The Advisory Committee provided input on the study process and review of study products. The Advisory Committee met at key points throughout the study to address specific questions related to each phase of the study.

A major effort of the study was to collect extensive data regarding the current public transportation providers and social service providers in Montana. With the help of the Advisory Committee, a list of key transportation providers in the state was assembled and the Provider Survey or Social Service Survey was mailed to each agency. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather information on the current supply of transportation services and identify the need for additional resources (vehicles, personnel, funding). The questionnaire asked for detailed operating and financial data. Recipients of the questionnaires received follow-up phone calls to answer any questions from the agency.

Baseline economic and demographic data were compiled from census data and various state offices. The data were used to identify various population segments that have various transit needs. Projections of population growth were also obtained and used to project future levels of transit need.

Methodologies for determining transit need were researched using other studies and reports from around the country. Where appropriate, existing methodologies were used and new techniques were developed to meet the unique requirements of Montana. The need for public transportation was defined based on a comparison of travel by households without vehicles to those with vehicles.

Transit need was compared to existing services based on the information reported in the surveys by the providers and social service agencies. This information yielded estimates of the level of unmet transit need. The analysis of unmet need was summarized for each of the 56 counties in Montana.

Future levels of transit need were estimated for each of the counties based on the needs methodology and projections of population changes. The cost of providing service with public or nonprofit agencies in the future was also estimated using cost data obtained from the provider survey and social services survey. These estimates provide an indication of the funding which will be required for capital and operating over the next 10 years.

KEY DEFINITIONS

The following key definitions of terms will be useful in the reading of this report:

- ***Passenger-Trip*** - Travel between an origin and destination, a round-trip is two trips.
- ***Program-Related Trips*** - Trips taken to attend or in association with a human service program. These are trips which would otherwise not be made but for the existence of the program.
- ***Non-Program Trips*** - Trips taken by individuals, not related to a particular human service program.
- ***General Public Trips*** - Individual trips, not associated with a particular human service program.
- ***Transit Need*** - An estimate of transit trips needed annually and based on demographic characteristics regardless of actual service levels.
- ***Transit Demand*** - An estimate of expected transit service use based on specific demographic based needs and service level assumptions.

OVERVIEW OF REPORT

Chapter II presents a discussion of needs definition and a methodology to calculate transit needs. Chapter III presents the demographic data that were used continuously throughout the study.

Chapter IV describes the data collection efforts for the transportation provider survey and also for the social services survey. The chapter discusses the process of the surveys and how the survey was administered.

Chapter V presents the findings from the study by county. The chapter provides a profile of each county, depicting each transportation provider, including transit agencies and social service providers.



Chapter VI presents information on the public transit agencies across the state. These include public and specialized transit providers, excluding social service providers, which are provided in Chapter VII. A one-page summary is given for each agency including service characteristics, financial information, transportation conditions, and system inventories.

Chapter VIII includes demand estimation techniques that will be used to calculate the transit needs for the State of Montana. Chapter IX presents the 2010 transit need by county, and Chapter X presents the future challenges and recommendations for the Montana Department of Transportation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been written in the past 30 years about public transportation demand forecasting for urban and rural settings. A review of public transportation industry research literature on demand forecasting for rural and small city environments was conducted for the Transit Cooperative Research Program Project B-3. This literature search has been updated to include more recent research. The bibliography is included with this Final Report as Appendix A.

A major issue to be determined is the definition of transit needs. Little has been written to develop a definition of transit needs. Transit Needs Assessments from Arkansas, Colorado, and North Carolina were reviewed to determine the definition of need. The Arkansas and North Carolina studies relied



on observed demand for transit services throughout the state to provide a proxy for need. Colorado used an approach termed the Mobility Gap and a measure of transit level of service to define transit needs.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The TNBS Advisory Committee consisted of individuals representing transportation providers, the Montana Department of Transportation, and other public agencies. The Advisory Committee representatives and their affiliations are listed in Table I-1.

The Advisory Committee provided policy guidance for the study, identified key issues, and assisted in assembly of data on current transportation-related subjects.

| Table I-1 Montana Statewide Rural Passenger Needs Study Advisory Committee | |
|---|---------------------------|
| Member | Affiliation |
| Cindy Jaynes | Fergus County COA |
| Deanna Thielman | Eagle Transit |
| Kathy Wilkins | Spring Meadow Resources |
| Noel Larrivee | MR TMA |
| Joe Gilboy | Butte-Silver Bow COA |
| Larry Lovelace | DHH Disability Services |
| Charlie Rehbein | DHH Aging Services Bureau |
| Tom Stuber | MDT- Transit |
| Janis Winston | MDT- Transit |
| Dick Turner | MDT – Bureau Chief |
| | |

